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2011 INNOVATIVE COURSE DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Muhtaseb Report

Category: Course Development Grant, Spring 2011

Name of Project Director: Dr. Ahlam Muhtaseb, Department of Communication Studies, amuhtase@csusb.edu, 75897

Date Proposal Submitted: January 12, 2011

Date Report Submitted: November, 14, 2011

Project Title: *New Course in Applied Communication and Social Justice*

Project Goal: Designing a new undergraduate upper division class that revolves around the importance of communication in seeking social justice and social change.

I am currently teaching this class in the Fall quarter of 2011.

Project Original Description:

This proposal aims at developing an applied communication class from a social justice perspective to be offered at the Department of Communication Studies. The class will be offered the first time under the Advanced Topics Class in Human Communication. In the future, the class will be proposed as a permanent class in the communication discipline and would satisfy elective needs for all five communication concentrations. There are currently approximately 480 undergraduate and 40 graduate students enrolled in the Department of Communication Studies. This is a new class that has never been offered; therefore, there is not an available syllabus and part of the preparation for this class, to be covered by the grant, is creating a syllabus. However, the following topics will be covered in the proposed class: Applied communication theory and research; engaged scholarship, social constructions of reality; social constructions of meaning, language, thought and social power; political economy of communication; articulation and struggle; intervention-oriented applied communication research; case studies/ applications/ praxis; democracy and social responsibility; social justice and social change, applied communication ethics and funding.

Implementation:

In Spring 2011, I was successful in generating syllabi and teaching ideas/suggestions from several communication professors, but the most influential was Professor Larry Frey of the University of Colorado, Boulder who is considered one of the leading scholars in communication and social justice research. I decided to adopt the first volume of the series he co-edited with Carragee titled "Communication Activism," supported

with a list of 18 scholarly articles. I got several interesting ideas for class activities, assignments, and advocacy/intervention.

In summer, I worked on the syllabus and narrowed down the list of activities and assignments into the 6 most reasonable to be completed in a 10-week quarter (see attached syllabus). The major assignment is a three-phase project that revolves around a certain social issue or problem that the students are interested in. They first submit an issue paper describing the issue and explaining its scope in society providing initial literature review and potential path for their future intervention. They then submit a proposal that includes an expansion on the research they did on the issue adding a potential “practical communication theory” they could use to lead their research and ultimately intervention. The proposal contains a proposed intervention on their part as means of helping in raising awareness of the problem or seeking some type of social change through their advocacy (we agreed it is really hard to solve a social problem but we could help towards a solution). The last phase is the implementation of the project (during the month of November), and then students submit their final reports December 1st, in which they build on their first and second assignment, providing a detailed explanation of the implementation of their intervention and an assessment of its success or response(s) to it by civil society and/or the government. There were also an open-book midterm, class presentations of applied communication studies, and participation grades. Graduate students had to do an extra assignment, which was a full-fledged prospectus.

Originally, 17 students registered for the class including three graduate students; however, we are now down to 12 students including 2 graduate students. The reason for losing 5 students might be due, according to at least two of the students who dropped, to the heavy reading load of this class. We are now in the implementation of intervention/advocacy project now. The proposals that were submitted by the students included several innovative ideas including: writing an OpEd, creating a Facebook fan page for raising awareness or collecting signatures, conducting either a class or a seminar on a social issue, conducting discourse analysis of children messages about bullying, and a short egg film (a visual egg is a short educational film that is usually 3-5 minutes long).

During the first week of classes, I conducted a short survey questionnaire to examine students’ knowledge of the class subject matter, their expectations of the class, and their involvement in any social change/justice activism (see attached questionnaire). It seems that most students have very little or no knowledge of the subject matter, are minimally or not involved at all in any social issue, and they are not sure about what to expect out of the class. I will repeat the same questionnaire at the end of the quarter to see how much they have gotten out of class.

Lastly, this class is still in the implementation process, so it is hard to provide a comprehensive report of the progress and success of class. I would like to suggest that the due date of the report be pushed to December instead of November to provide a better timeframe for a more accurate report on any course development grant for a Fall class.

The only thing I would like to add at this point is that, so far, I have been successful in following my original proposal and plan except for the topics covered as I had to take out some of these proposed topics and add more relevant and current ones.